



CITY COUNCIL MINUTES SPECIAL (EMERGENCY) MEETING OCTOBER 3, 2014

CALL TO ORDER & ROLL CALL

Mayor Bruce Bassett called the Special (Emergency) Meeting to order at 1:05 pm in the Council Chambers of City Hall, 9611 SE 36th Street, Mercer Island, Washington.

Councilmembers Debbie Bertlin, Mike Cero, Tana Senn, Benson Wong, Deputy Mayor Dan Grausz, and Mayor Bruce Bassett were present. Councilmember Jane Brahm was absent.

SPECIAL BUSINESS

Briefing on the Activation of the City's Emergency Operation Center to Address the Water Concerns

Mayor Bruce Bassett explained that the Special Meeting was being held to brief the Council and the public on the status of the boil-water advisory currently in effect. He outlined the presentations as follows:

1. Report from Bob James, Northwest Region Manager of Field Operations for the Office of Drinking Water from the Washington State Department of Health.
2. Field work report by Maintenance Director Glenn Boettcher & Utilities Operation Manager Terry Smith.
3. Public communications and outreach report by Communications Manager Ross Freeman.

City Manager Treat thanked staff for their hard work and putting in long hours in responding to this situation.

Mr. James spoke about working with City staff and Seattle/King County Public Health to respond to the E. coli contamination. He showed the Council the sample collection locations and detailed the investigation into the potential source of the contamination.

Maintenance Director Glenn Boettcher spoke about increasing the number of samples; from 6 per day to 18 per day. He noted that the samples are all clean, but that they have not identified the source of the contamination yet. He reviewed staff's current actions:

- divers will be inspecting the reservoir tanks over the weekend
- active construction sites are being evaluated by Development Services
- DOH is reviewing the City's backflow prevention program
- evaluating small components of water system; any place where water could collect (air vacuums or vaults)
- recent water main breaks were reviewed for possible backflow contamination
- additional chlorine treatment in the water system
- flushing of the system, when and where appropriate
- crews from the cities of Bellevue and Issaquah are on call and ready to assist

Mr. James spoke about the current sampling stations and the process DOH has taken since the first contaminated sample was returned. He also showed the new sampling sites that have been added to the collections. He spoke about DOH's standard procedure for responding to E. coli contamination: look at source of supply, treatment, storage facilities and aboveground facilities, distribution system (pressures, water main breaks, any unusual construction), and sample collection (where/how they are collected and tested).

Councilmember Cero asked staff for data regarding chlorine levels at the stations where E. coli was detected for the past three days.

Councilmember Wong asked if the chlorine boosts are stopped or lowered, could the E. coli return. Mr. James noted that along with the chlorine treatments, the system is flushed to eliminate the source.

Councilmember Senn asked how common it is to not find the source of contamination. Mr. James replied that in the majority of cases, they cannot positively identify the source; they just treat the symptoms.

Councilmember Bertlin asked what citizens can do to help. Manager Smith noted that he has heard from some citizens who have recently done work on their irrigation systems or installed backflow devices and wanted to make sure they were not the cause of the contamination. He asked that if any homes have had low or no water pressure to notify the City as soon as possible. Director Boettcher also asked citizens to notify the City if they have a backflow prevention device so the City can ensure annual inspections.

Councilmember Cero asked staff for data about how many backflow prevention device inspections are 6 months, 12 months, and 18 months overdue.

Deputy Mayor Grausz asked what causes chlorination levels to drop. Mr. James responded that, as water flows through the distribution system, chlorine does have a tendency to dissipate over time as there are chemical reactions happening. Deputy Mayor Grausz also asked at what level chlorine needs to be at to kill E. coli. Mr. James explained that E. coli is very sensitive to chlorine, but the concentration of chlorine and how long the E. coli is exposed to the chlorinated water are the determining factors. Deputy Mayor Grausz asked further questions about where the contaminated samples were found in relation to the reservoirs.

Deputy Mayor Grausz asked what the next steps are and how DOH and the City will determine when the emergency is over. Mr. James explained that DOH will continue to consult with the City by (1) collecting daily sample sets with satisfactory results and (2) implementing and making progress on the response plan, which will lead to all parties agreeing that the water is safe and the boil-advisory can be lifted.

Councilmember Cero requested that the City provide detailed information to citizens regarding how to properly flush the water in their homes.

Becky Elias, Acting Manager of the Food Program at Public Health – Seattle & King County, spoke to the Council about her team's efforts in helping Mercer Island restaurants, grocery stores, and delis during the boil-water advisory. She thanked all of the restaurants, who have been very cooperative throughout the incident. Her staff has been working to get as many establishments up and running on a limited menu during the incident.

Councilmember Wong asked what a limited menu means. Ms. Elias responded that they are working with businesses that have other facilities off Mercer Island where food is commercially made and pre-packaged, to bring those items to the Island. She also noted that they are working with establishments, in conjunction with DOH, to review dishwashing and hand washing capacities based on individual operations.

Deputy Mayor Grausz asked about the produce at grocery stores that have been exposed to water. Ms. Elias responded that they are working with the grocery stores and fresh food establishments regarding which products need to be discarded and those that are still safe to sell.

Councilmember Wong asked if Public Health is following up with the business to make sure they are following through with the instructions. Ms. Elias noted that inspectors will be in touch with the establishments daily. She also noted that they are working with the Farmers Market so they can be up and running on Sunday.

Communications Manager Ross Freeman spoke about the kinds of outreach that has been done regarding the boil-water advisory. Manager Freeman noted that the auto-dialing system that was used during the first advisory did not work well, so the City used the County's service to get to all landlines. He noted that the website is serving as the primary communications outlet for the latest official news. He spoke about how powerful social media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.) has been during this incident. He stated that staff is using as many email lists as possible to get the word out to as many people as possible, even though there is a lot of overlapping. He noted that the press releases have been daily and extensive to update the media as much as possible on any new developments. He stated that local media outlets and some national news outlets are picking up the story and sharing it. He noted other communication efforts of a-frame boards at freeway exit ramps, I-90 reader boards, volunteers going door-to-door, direct outreach to day cares and care facilities, phone calls to known vulnerable citizens, broadcasts on the local high school radio station, and phone bank staffing.

Emergency Manager Jennifer Franklin spoke about the emergency volunteer network, which mobilized with the first boil-water advisory and went door-to-door to notify as many people as possible. She spoke about what staff has learned through this incident as to what works well and what the City needs to improve on. She stated that the Emergency Operations Center was activated on Thursday morning and the City was issued a State mission number. The EOC will be staffed to support the Maintenance Department, the volunteers, and food

establishments on Mercer Island. She stated that citizens can help by getting to know their neighbors and communicating with each other about the incident.

Councilmember Senn asked why the emergency well was not activated during this incident. Manager Franklin responded that the well is only activated when the water supply to the Island is shut off. She also noted that the well water is not potable water, so it would still need to be boiled.

Councilmember Wong asked if bottled water at the Community Center would continue through the weekend. Manager Franklin stated that the water is for the vulnerable population, not necessarily for those who are able to purchase water on their own. She noted that tomorrow staff will evaluate whether to continue distributing water over the weekend.

Deputy Mayor Grausz asked about what people with family members who are sick should do. Manager Freeman noted that all medical professionals must report if any of their patients have E. coli to DOH and Public Health – Seattle & King County. He stated that at this time there are no confirmed cases of a Mercer Island resident with E. coli. Manager Franklin stated that anyone with symptoms should go to their doctor to be checked out.

Mayor Bassett thanked citizens for the patience in dealing with the boil-water advisory. He also thanked staff and volunteers for their long hours and dedication to the incident. He also thanked the Department of Health and Public Health – Seattle & King County for their assistance. He also noted that the businesses have been hit hard and he thanked them for their continued patience.


Councilmember Senn reminded citizens to be prepared for an emergency by planning to be self sufficient for 7 days.

ADJOURNMENT

The Special (Emergency) Meeting adjourned at 2:42 pm.


Bruce Bassett, Mayor

Attest:


Allison Spietz, City Clerk